

2-1F 'I was interested to see you'd...': Tasks that engage learners on an online course

Carole MacDiarmid, School of Modern Languages and Cultures

How do we engage students on online courses with learning content? How can we facilitate knowledge building through peer interaction, but also allow students to work flexibly and independently through weekly cycles of work? And how do we ensure demands on tutor time are manageable?. This talk will discuss these factors drawing on an evaluation of the postgraduate Teaching English for Academic Purposes online course, one which attracted participants working in eight different countries and across eight time zones.

The evaluation is based on weekly feedback surveys, which enabled a dynamic element to the course development, and on a content analysis of forum postings (based on Salmoni and Gonzalez, 2008). In addition, post-course interviews with lecturers and students provided further insights into the perceived usefulness of a range of different task types, and of the opportunities to collaborate, both planned and unplanned, that occurred. I will illustrate the key findings of the evaluation with both collaborative and individual tasks that were viewed as effective in encouraging engagement with the learning materials and with their peers. I will also identify those which, at least in this context, proved less successful in some respect.

References

Salmoni, A.J. & Gonzalez, M.L. 2008, "Online collaborative learning: Quantifying how people learn together online", *Medical Teacher*, vol. 30, no. 7, pp. 710-716.